

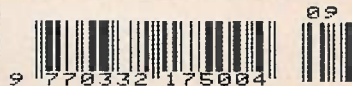
MAGILL

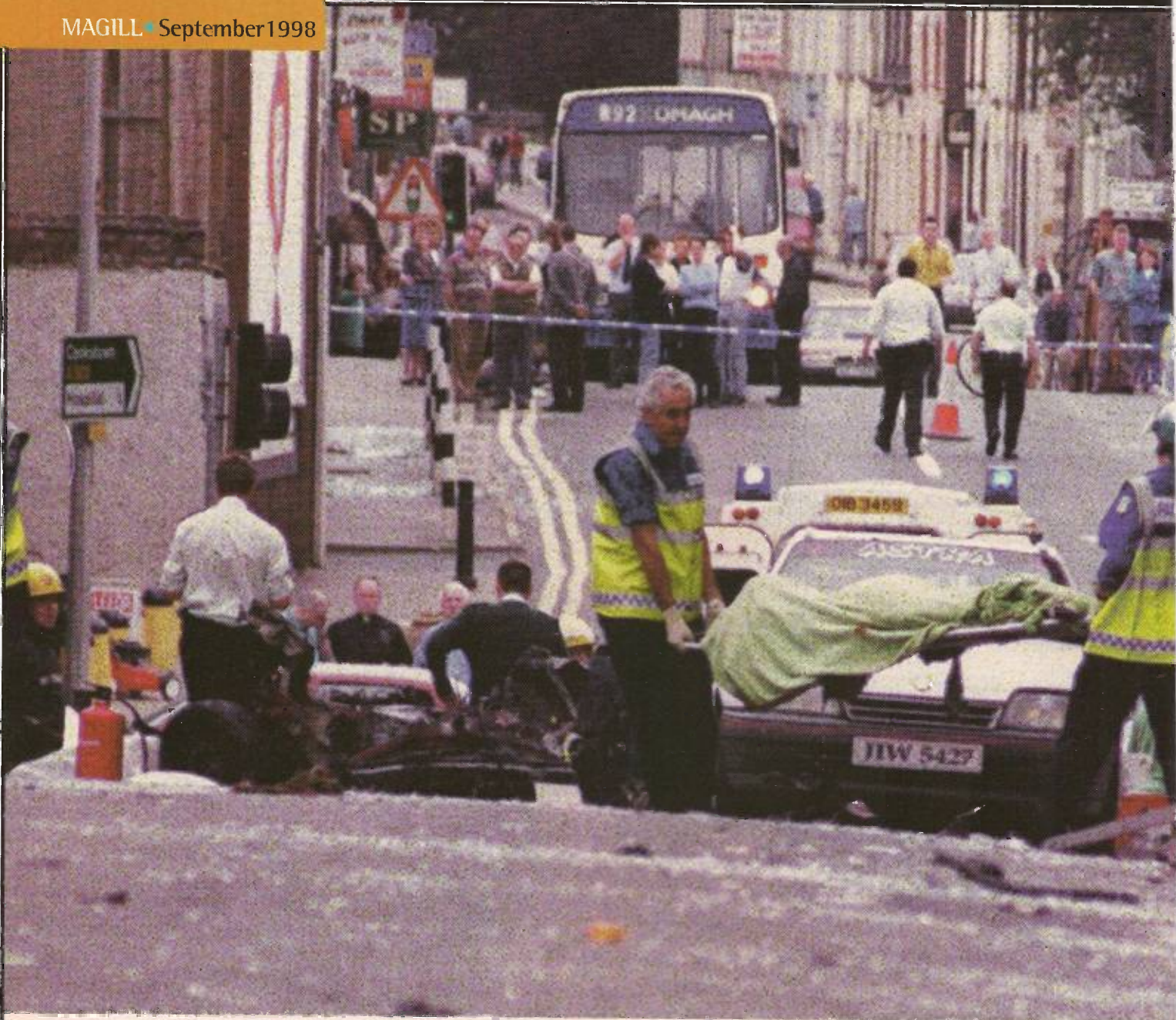
Ireland's Current Affairs Monthly Magazine

September 1998 £1.95

**"History creaks on
its bloody hinge,
And the unspeakable
is done again"**

John Montague, August 1998



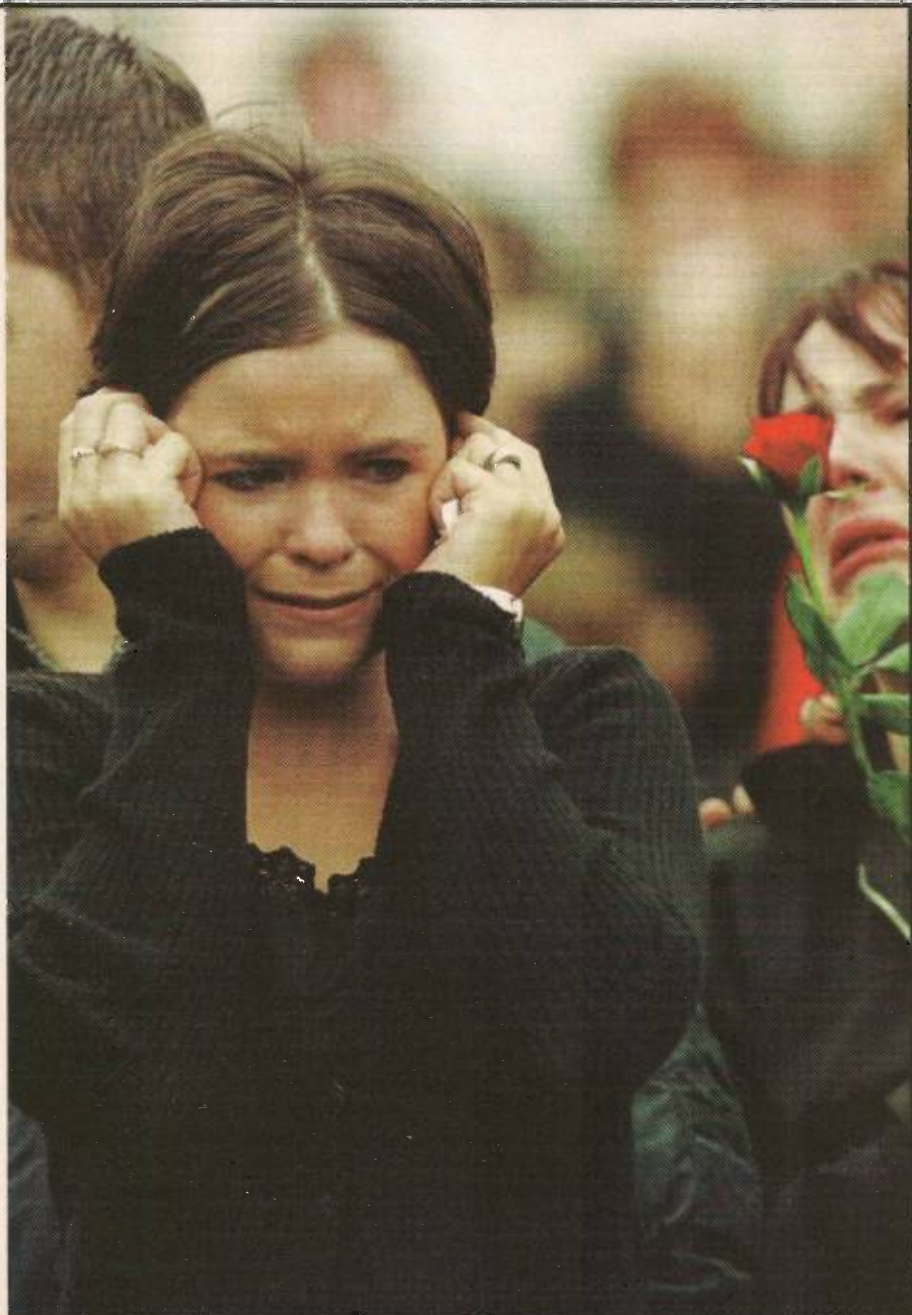


As history creaks on its bloody
And the unspeakable is done

Omagh - August



PACEMAKER



hinge again

1998

by Susan McKay

"Mammy...Where's Mammy?" A little girl screamed it through the flames and smoke and the tumbling debris of slates, planks, bits of cars and arms and legs in Market Street, Omagh, moments after the bomb exploded. Mothers, daughters, grandmothers, sons, husbands, fathers and friends lay dead in the rubble. Twenty one people died at the scene. Others were horribly injured. Seven have since died and eight more are, as we go to press, still critically ill. Many people have lost limbs.

"It's a wee boy I always seem to keep seeing, with his hair all burnt off," said Irene Cooke, one of those who helped the injured at the scene. "And I keep on hearing the screams of the people. You can't settle. You have to keep moving. You get to sleep but you wake up, remembering. You've an emptiness inside you for the peo-

One witness said the scene was "like an abattoir after someone has gone crazy." People spoke of the smell of blood and burning flesh. A fireball followed the explosion.

ple you know who've been killed."

The clowns were putting the finishing touches to their makeup. The children were straightening out their costumes, about to climb onto the floats. The street carnival was ready to begin.

Omagh was busy. Some of the people were from the town. Others came in from Tyrone's countryside. Places like Beragh, Carrickmore, Sixmilecross, Drumquin, Loughmacrory, Aughadarra, Eskra, Knockmoyle, Cappagh, Aughabrack, Killyclogher and Newtownsaville. Some came on a bus from Buncrana in the neighbouring county of Donegal, and they brought their Spanish visitors from Madrid with them.

But while these people made their ordinary journeys to and around Omagh, the bombers were also driving to town. The two men parked the maroon car outside Kells' drapery and school uniform supplier at the bottom

OMAGH

of Market Street, activated the timer and walked away.

When Roisin Kelly heard there was a bomb scare, she knew to take it seriously. Her son had been close to a huge bomb, and the family's pharmacy on Market Street had been bombed three times. She headed towards Nicholl and Shields furniture shop to wait. "I took two paces towards the door and then, for some reason, I put my two arms up around my head. When I turned around, two paces behind me were people who were dead.

"There was a lady beside me who was sobbing. 'My leg, my leg.' I saw that it was partly blown off and I tried to hide it from her by putting a big teddy bear over it while I tried to comfort her. You didn't know whom to go to first. A water main had burst and the water was flooding down, washing a river of blood down the street.

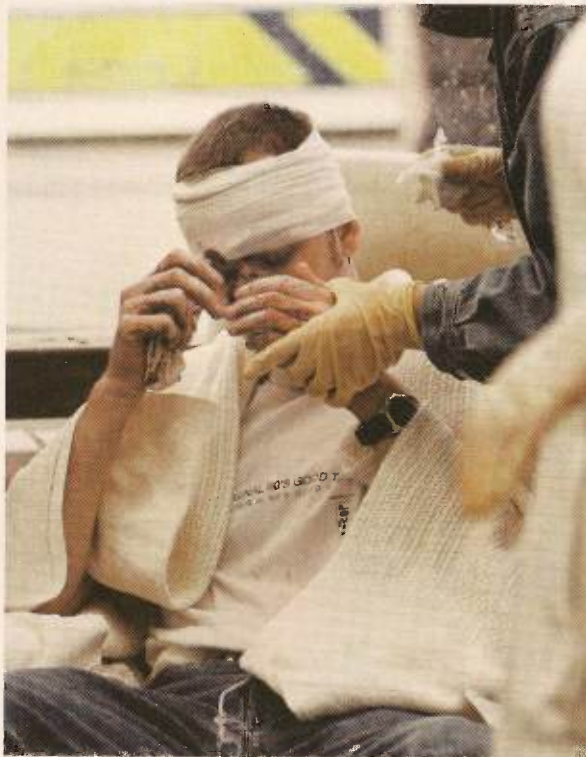
"I touched a woman's ankles and they were cold as ice. I stroked her head, said an act of contrition. I rubbed my cheek against hers to let her know she wasn't alone. I saw my son walking with a woman and she had a young boy's foot in her hand. The lid of a manhole had been blown off, and when I went to lift it I found there was an amputated leg under it." One witness said the scene was "like an abattoir after someone has gone crazy." People spoke of the smell of blood and burning flesh. A fireball followed the explosion.

Tyrone is full of people with such memories now. "I saw a baby lying in a shop window like a rag doll," said one man. Another said, "I saw a woman with her hip blown off. Another woman was lying and her leg had been blown off. There was two wee lassies sitting with a wee boy. He was about eight, I asked could I help them and one of them said, 'He's dead. He's only a cub and he's dead.'"

Wesley Reid is an Omagh RUC man based in the village of Fintona. He arrived at the scene minutes after the explosion. "It was horrendous. Women and children screaming and crying and blood pouring from them. I saw a lot of bodies. We got the walking wounded away to hospital in whatever vehicles were available and we put a cordon round the scene. I helped to lift the burning axle of a car off a young girl who was screaming and trying to get up. I saw a baby lying dead outside Kells shop. I zipped up her body bag and then I broke down.

An ambulance man looked at me crying and he said, 'Its tight, big lad.' Tight, Constable Reid explained, is an Omagh word for terrible.

It fell to Constable Lynne Cordner to note details of the bodies in order to help identify them. "Bodies were arriving covered in blood and with terrible injuries," she said. "I unzipped a white bag and it contained the body of a wee baby. It looked as if it was sleeping. I've never seen so many bodies before. I just switched off and did what I had to do. I've avoided the television and the



ALAN LEWIS

papers. I don't want to see the faces of the people who were dead." The last two people to be identified were Olive Hawkes and Brian McCrory. Only their fingerprints could identify both.

Tyrone County Hospital was, in the words of one doctor, "like a battlefield." Staff had to paddle through blood to get to the injured, and when someone died, the immediate priority had to be to turn to help someone who might survive. Staff nurse Marian Skeath described the death of one woman. "There was a lady and she had her family with her but there was nothing more could be done for her and she was dead. She had to be taken off the trolley and put on the floor because someone else needed the trolley. It was an awful decision but it had to be made quickly. Her son said, 'anywhere but the floor', so we made her a makeshift structure. I will never forget the look on her family's

face. When someone dies they deserve the respect of a living person." The nurses and doctors knew many of the dead and injured, and some lost close family members.

A consultant at the Altnagelvin hospital in Derry, Mr Kanwar Panesar, praised the way staff at Omagh had selected the patients they sent to the different hospitals. "We have orthopaedic expertise here, and we got mostly orthopaedic injuries. The Royal in Belfast got the serious burns," he said. Mr Panesar said that patients were immediately given morphine and antibiotics, and the first of them were in theatre within 15 minutes of arrival. One young boy had lost a foot, and a foot had been sent with him, wrapped in plastic. But it was not his foot. It was a girl's foot, with painted toenails. Mr Panesar said the Altnagelvin's system for dealing with emergencies has been refined through experience. Experience including Bloody Sunday, the Ballykelly bomb, and the Greysteel massacre. Many staff at the Tyrone and Erne hospitals have worked with victims of the Enniskillen bomb and of the Ballygawley ambush. The day before the bomb, the North's papers carried pictures of a young man who had been critically injured at Enniskillen, and now, 11 years later, was getting married.

At the Leisure Centre in Omagh, people gathered to wait for news of their loved ones. Lists were pinned up and amended as new information came in. Health board and council staff operated a system whereby those for whom the news was the worst were taken aside so that their grief could have some privacy. The area used for this was normally the creche, a cheerful corner full of bright toys and paintings. One woman who helped run the incident centre said she regretted that no one had thought to exclude the media. "It's not that they weren't moved by what they saw. But they were clustering round families which had been bereaved, and wanting to use phones and faxes."

The phone system in Omagh had in fact broken down. Rita Doherty is the mother of one of the Buncrana children who had gone to Omagh on the summer scheme trip along with the young Spanish visitors. "My daughter, Rita Marie, is eleven. She rang me and said, 'Mummy, there's a bomb scare.' Then there was a huge bang and she was cut off." There fol-

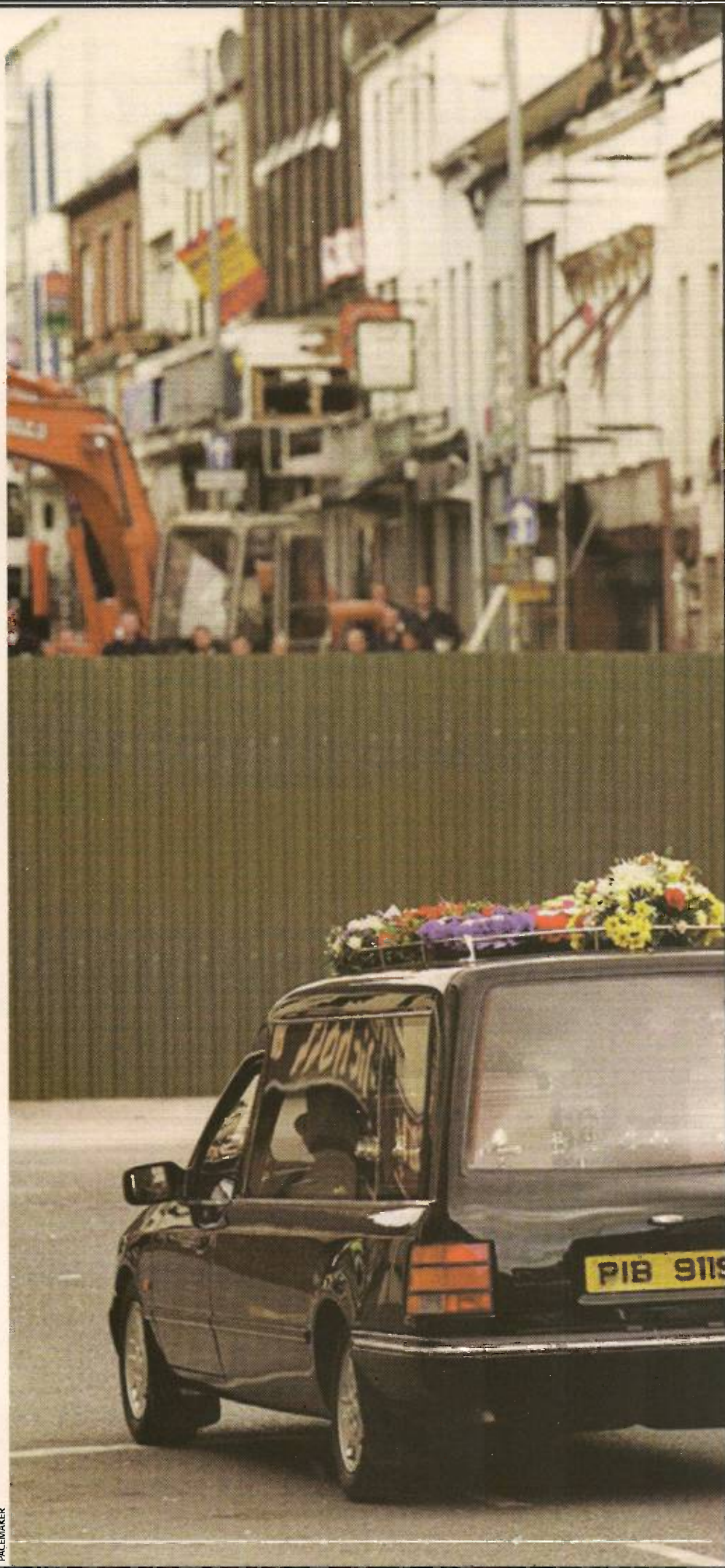
lowed, for the families, hours of panic and terror as they waited for news from Omagh. "At 8.30 Rita Marie came up Knockalla Park. We were overjoyed, yet so sad that some of her pals have not come home. She has been sleeping tight to me since. I'm so glad to feel the warmth of her skin against me. But I feel guilty that other parents will never know that feeling again."

Oran Doherty (8) and Sean McLoughlin (12) were both from the little housing estate. "Wee smilers," a neighbour called them. James Barker (12), whose parents had moved to Buncrana from England to give their family a better life, lived across the small Donegal town, which looks out over Lough Swilly, the lake of shadows. On Monday night the bodies were brought home. "There was a hush over the whole area and then when the hearses appeared, everyone was crying out loud," said Rita Doherty. "People were trying to gather the children into a wee nest in our arms, they were so devastated. We all feel we are caught up in something we don't understand and there never will be any explanation because it doesn't make sense. It makes me frightened to be part of the planet. Poor Ireland. It is dear buying it. To lose our beautiful wee babies out of this town."

James Barker's 14 year old sister, Estella, wrote in my notebook, "He was kind and gentle and always thought about other people. We loved him very much. We will never forget what those men did to all those innocent people." Mary Gallagher, with whom 12 year old Fernando Blasco was staying, said that his death had left her feeling as if she had lost a son. "He was a lovely child," she said. "I called him Speedy Gonzalez. He was so full of life."

There were two days of funerals. So many funerals. At one stage, in Omagh town, three hearses were on one street at the same time, and mourners standing outside one packed church could hear the singing from another across the way. People were unable to attend the funerals of close friends because closer friends or relatives were also being buried.

Breda Devine was just 21 months old; a miracle child who had been born several months premature and was saved only by dedicated nursing at the Altnagelvin hospital in Derry, and the love of her parents. Her mother, Tracey, had brought her to



OMAGH

Omagh to buy her shoes to wear to the wedding of her uncle. She was to be a flower girl. She lies now in her grave in the foothills of the Sperrins. Paul Devine carried the small white coffin of his daughter under one arm. Breda's brother who is six, touched the coffin, his little face desolate. Tracey Devine lay critically ill in a Belfast hospital, not knowing she had lost her youngest child.

Little Maura Monaghan should be excited about the imminent birth of the twin girls her mother Avril was expecting in September. Instead Maura, aged 18 months, now lies beside Avril (30), in the graveyard at Beragh. The twins are dead and buried too, though they were not yet born. So is their Grandmother, Avril's mother, Mary Grimes. It was her 65th birthday that Saturday and Avril had brought her into town to celebrate. Mary's husband, Michael, had a bunch of flowers in the house to give her when she got home. She was carried home to wreaths instead.

"She was my wife. She was my mother. She was my daughter. She was my friend. She was my soul mate," sobbed Lawrence Rushe. Libby Rushe (57) spent the hours before her death in her cafe, Libby's, serving coffee and buns to tired shoppers. Debra Anne Cartwright (20) the daughter of a policeman who helped in the aftermath of the explosion, had been helping women look good for the weekend, in her summer job at the beautician's above Kelly's pharmacy. She was to go to study textile design in Manchester this autumn. Julie Hughes (21) was home from university at Dundee to see her parents. She had a summer job in a photo shop on High Street. Her twin brother, Justin, followed her coffin along with her other siblings.

Many of the dead were young. Some of them should have got their "11" level results the Thursday after the bomb. Lorraine Wilson (15) and her friend Samantha McFarland (17) were working as volunteers in the Oxfam shop, where a sign in the window reads; "The people of Sudan need your help."

Several of the young people were talented at sports. Jolene Marlowe (17), who had helped St Macartan's win the Tyrone Senior Football championship a week before her murder, had brought her elderly great-aunt, Bernie Shaw out for a day at the shops. Brenda Logue (17) was a goalkeeper, who was in town with her

mother and grandmother. Gareth Conroy (18) was in Omagh to buy contact lenses, the better to play football. His number seven jersey will not be worn again this year, a Loughmacrory GAA spokesman said. At his funeral, a small child sat on a gravestone and asked, "Daddy, why is Gareth in that box?"

Alan Radford (16), a Mormon, was helping his mother with the shopping. His father, Melvin, a former British



ALAN LEWIS

soldier, had been seriously injured by the IRA and had gone to England after threats some years ago. Alan's brother, Paul, went searching for his brother after the bomb, and ended up digging others out of the rubble. Aidan Gallagher (21) had gone into Watterson's to buy boots and jeans. The IRA murdered his uncle, a part-time UDR man, 14 years ago. Aidan's father spoke in a heartbroken whisper about his only son. "He was an ordinary fellow. He was just everything you would want him to be."

Philomena Skelton (39) only lived a few miles from Omagh, at Drumquin, but she was, her husband Kevin said, "a home bird", and went to the town just twice a year, once to do her Christmas shopping, and once to get school uniforms for her children. Her 13-year-old daughter, Shauna, who was injured in the blast, was allowed out of hospital briefly to follow her

mother's coffin. She carried a single orchid.

Veda Short (46) from Gortaclare in South Armagh, Ann McCombe (48) and Geraldine Breslin (35) were described by Roisin Kelly as "three great girls." Ann, a Protestant, was best friends with Geraldine, a Catholic. They worked for Tom Watterson, an evangelical Protestant. His clothes shop was closed with a notice on its shutters stating that it would remain so until after the funerals "of our three highly respected and dedicated members of staff." Mrs Short had held a newborn baby in her arms—her grandson, Lee—just hours before she was murdered.

Esther Gibson (36) was on her way back from having pictures of herself and her fiancé, Kenneth, fitted into a locket he had given her, when the bomb went off. A Sunday School teacher, she had written in her bible a few years ago, "Oh God if it please thee, send me a man of God to be his partner in life." She met Kenneth two years ago. "I wish I had died with her," he said, weeping, when he heard she was gone. Rocio Abad (24) was one of the leaders who had brought the Spanish children to Buncrana from Madrid, and she was supervising them on the day out to the Omagh Folk Park, and afterwards to the shops. She loved Ireland.

Olive Hawkes (60) was a farmer's wife, described by a relation as, "a person who would drop everything and run to help anyone who needed it." Brian McCrory (54) was described by friends as a good and gentle man, a crane driver. One of his wreaths read, "To my lovely dancing partner."

Edith White lost her husband and her son in the massacre. Fred White (60) and his son, Brian (27) were out for the afternoon together. Mr White senior was a leading member of the Ulster Unionist Party in Omagh. Brian White worked for the Boys Brigade in his spare time. Both were horticulturists and Brian was responsible for the design and maintenance of flowerbeds and hanging baskets in towns and villages across Tyrone.

Omagh is what is known as a mixed town, and the dead faithfully reflected the religious breakdown of the area. Whereas some towns in the North might better be described as segregated such is the hostility between the two communities, Omagh is a mild and mannerly place, though some of its hinterland vil-



Avril Monaghan (30)



Alan Radford (16)



Ann McCombe (48)



Brian White (27)



Brenda Logue (17)



Debra Cartwright (20)



Esther Gibson (36)



Elizabeth Rushe (57)

Brian McCrory
(54)



Fernando Blasco (12)



Fred White (60)



Geraldine Breslin (35)



Aidan Gallagher (21)

Julie Hughes
(21)



Gareth Conway (18)



Jolene Marlowe (17)



Olive Hawkes (60)



Lorraine Wilson (15)

Breda Devine
(21 months)



Sean McLoughlin (12)



Oran Doherty (8)



James Barker (12)



Philomena Skelton (39)

Mama Monaghan
(18 months)



Rojo Abad (24)



Samantha McFarland (17)



Mary Grimes (60)



Veda Short (46)

lages are fiercer. In Kells' shop, nine people died. The women buying school uniforms there were from both communities, though in Fermanagh Catholics boycotted branches of the outfitters after Drumcree 1996, because of Mr Kells' involvement in the Orange Order.

Omagh was gerrymandered after partition to ensure Unionist control, and Catholics lived for years in the overcrowded Gallows Hill area. "It is a garrison town. We are used to a military presence," said Christine Nesbitt, community relations officer with the council. The town was shocked earlier this year by the murder of a young woman.

There is one integrated school. The carnival, which was to take place on the day of the bomb, was a cross-community one, and the Churches Forum provided a structure for the communal mourning, which has taken place since. Nicola Emery (21) was hurt in the bomb, but gave birth to a healthy baby girl days later. Nicola is Protestant, while her partner, Michael Mulholland (17), is Catholic. There is a graveyard in the town where both Catholics and Protestants are buried.

The anti-Agreement UUP dissident, Willie Thompson, is the MP for the area. During the last Westminster election count in Omagh Leisure Centre, when Martin McGuinness took his mid-Ulster seat, Reverend Willie McCrea told voters they would "reap a bitter harvest." Ken Maginnis, the UUP's security spokesman, said that at one of the funerals, a young man had said to him that those who had advocated a Yes vote in the May referendum had a lot to answer for. "I said to him, there are 3,300 dead as a result of 30 years of the Troubles. We have to work together."

In Buncrana, Martin McGuinness said Sinn Féin had felt no animosity from the people after the bomb. "They recognise that the people who planted it want to destroy what Sinn Féin has worked for in this process." A young man from an IRA family said, "No one better talk to me now about armed struggle." He said, however, that there would be no "informing" on old accomplices. Others, however, said that blind eyes might no longer be turned to guns hidden in Donegal hay sheds.

The former Sinn Féin councillor, Francie Mackey, now chairman of the group which fronts the Real IRA, is a member of Omagh District Council,

His son was one of those arrested after the bomb, and, at an emergency council meeting two days later, he said he would be seeking council support to have the boy freed. "He was ignored," said one of those present. All those arrested have since been released.

DUP councillor, Oliver Gibson, is a close relation of Esther Gibson who died in the massacre. "There have been 28 bombs in Omagh, and my



constituency of West Tyrone had seen more murders than any other in Northern Ireland," he said. His brother died a week before the bomb from the long-term effects of an IRA ambush. Reverend Ian Paisley called at Esther Gibson's Free Presbyterian funeral for God the avenger "to execute wrath upon him who does evil." There were cries of Amen. Other church leaders, Protestant and Catholic, called for support for the Peace Process. Many of the people in and around Omagh, including the young people, are deeply religious, their God, for the most part, being a benign one. Some balked, though, at calls from the Catholic Church, for prayers of forgiveness for the bombers.

PUP loyalist leader David Ervine warned, within days of the bomb, that the UVF cease-fire might now be under threat. "How could anyone

human believe for one moment that the right response to this atrocity is more bloodshed?" said one woman. "We were only coming to terms with the murder of the Quinn children." Richard, Mark and Jason Quinn, aged 10, 9 and 8, died when loyalists fire-bombed their home in Ballymoney after a demonstration in support of the Orange Order at Drumcree in July. Their Mother, Christine, is a Catholic.

Asked about the Real IRA's apologies to the civilians' statement, one man shook his head silently, and gestured towards people weeping as they placed flowers on Drumragh Bridge, the ruined buildings beyond them. There was a ripple of applause for the RUE's search team as they crossed the bridge after a day on the bomb-site. Prince Charles came, and spoke about the murder of Earl Mountbatten. "You'd miss Diana," said a woman. Princess Diana had visited the survivors of the Enniskillen bomb. Among the crowds that gathered to mourn Omagh's dead and to honour their survivors, there was a sense of solidarity, compassion and peace.

The bomb has re-opened old griefs all over the North. Talking to people in the crowds outside packed churches and chapels during the funerals, it is striking how many people refer to murders in their own families over the past 30 years. Paddy O'Hagan's pregnant wife Kathleen was murdered by the UVF at their home in Co Tyrone four years ago. "It has brought everything back as if it was yesterday," he said.

Omagh council's chief executive, John McKinney, has vowed that the town will be rebuilt, and that the people will find the strength to recover. Poet John Montague who comes from Tyrone, remarked upon the fact that the bombers struck on the day which in the Catholic calendar is the Feast of the Assumption, when the Blessed Virgin ascended to heaven. He spoke for many when he said; "One hopes this is the end for extreme Republicanism, just as one hopes that the death of the three Quinn children marks the end for extreme Orangeism."

Ministers and priests have called on God to give the people the Balm of Gilead, to comfort and support them so that the weak might "soar on wings like eagles." Surgeons have administered morphine, and pharmacists Valium. The agony, for now, seems undiminished.

A Response to Omagh



All I can do is curse, complain.
Who can endorse such violent men?
As history creaks on its bloody hinge
And the unspeakable is done again.

With no peace after the deluge,
No ease after the storm;
We learn to live inside ruin
Like a second home.

John Montague, August 1998

Inside The Real IRA

The Dublin government in secret talks with Real IRA before Omagh

By Liz Walsh

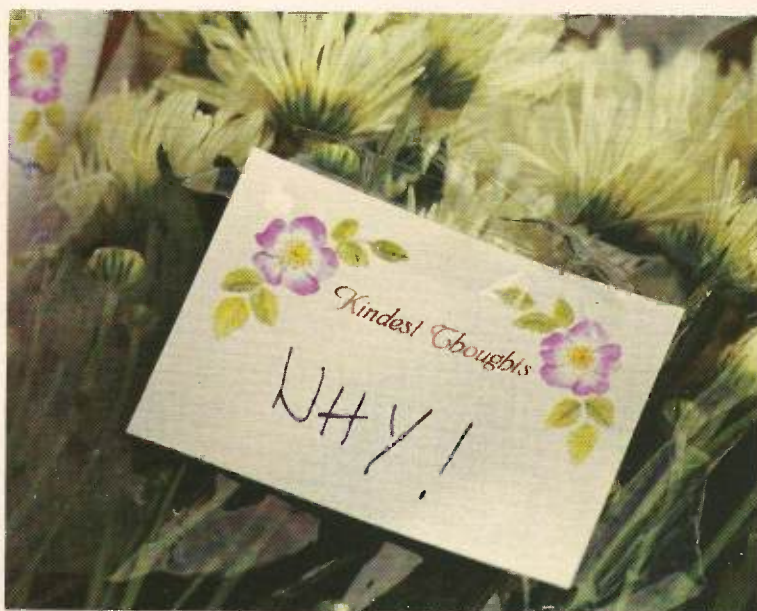
The Irish government was in secret indirect negotiations with the Real IRA in the weeks immediately preceding the Omagh bombing on August 15.

The Belfast Redemptorist priest, Fr Alex Reid acted as an intermediary and documents from the Office of the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, were handed over. The Taoiseach's adviser on Northern Ireland, Martin Mansergh, was also involved in the contacts.

The documents concerned were shown to Magill by the Real IRA, which said that the contacts were an "ongoing attempt by the Government to bring an end to the use of force by the RIRA." The Real IRA executive member told Magill that since the Omagh bombing up to the time of going to press (August 24), there had been no contact between the two sides through intermediaries or otherwise.

The executive member also informed Magill at the time of going to press that the leading members of the Real IRA had arranged to meet to consider a permanent cease-fire—a suspension of operations had been announced in the days immediately

following the Omagh bombing. There are conflicting signals from within the organisation on its likely future course. Some activists want to pursue



KELVIN BOYES

an exclusively political route, while others want the option to resume the military campaign.

The Real IRA executive member who spoke to Magill said, in the immediate aftermath of the Omagh bombing, that while he was opposed to the use of car bombs because of

their "indiscriminate" effect himself, the organisation as a whole deeply regretted the casualties. However, he insisted: "(the Omagh atrocity) wasn't

that different from other terrible tragedies—the cause of the conflict hasn't been addressed and because of that everybody has suffered." Clearly the fatalities at Omagh and the public outrage over what happened unnerved the leadership of the Real IRA. Within hours of issuing a statement acknowledging its responsibility for the bomb and its assertion that it was part of "an ongoing war" against British presence in Ireland, it issued a further statement announcing a "suspension" of operations. That latter statement followed a secret meeting in Dundalk where several members argued for a ceasefire.

According to a Garda source, one of the people attending that meeting was the organisation's key explosives engineer. And it was the engineer according to the Garda source, who argued for a ceasefire and insisted, at a minimum, on an announcement of a "suspension" of operations.

The Real IRA executive member,



PRELUDE TO OMAGH: THE REAL IRA BOMBED BANBRIDGE ON AUGUST 1 LAST - 33 INJURED AND £2 MILLION WORTH OF DAMAGE

who spoke to Magill, said that a ceasefire was under consideration even before the Omagh bombing. One of the leading figures in the Munster area, where the Real IRA has taken over the infrastructure and much of the membership of the Provisional IRA, is said to have been "sickened" by the Omagh bomb and to be now in favour of a ceasefire.

Immediately following the Tuesday, August 18 announcement of a "suspension" of military operations, the Real IRA executive member said that the intention then was to pursue their objectives solely through political means, principally through the 32 County Sovereignty Committee's UN challenge to Britain's right to sovereignty. Asked what follows if the UN does not uphold the challenge, the source said: "Then we'll accept it. That's it."

So far, there has been no response from the Continuity IRA to the Taoiseach's call for an end to republican violence. Republican Sinn Féin, widely regarded as the political wing

of the CIRA, condemned the "slaughter of the innocents at Omagh" as "totally unjustified". Although reaction within the CIRA appears to be one of revulsion, a source close to the group said the "root cause" of the bomb was Britain's occupation. Asked if they blamed the RIRA for the raft of draconian legislation about to be enacted, he said: "No, it's the State that's bringing it in, not the dissidents. Let's be clear where the blame lies."

Contrary to recent reports, there is no evidence of co-operation between the CIRA and the RIRA. The two differ fundamentally on recognition of the 26 counties. The CIRA believes the RIRA are not "true republicans" principally because they recognise Leinster House. There is no indication that the CIRA is considering a cease-fire.

The RIRA executive member acknowledged that the public outrage that followed Omagh would result in a severe setback for the organisation, but one from which

they could conceivably recover. "Look what happened after Enniskillen. Gerry Adams was crucified. But he survived, politically."

However, a Provisional IRA member said "With Omagh, they (the Real IRA) did what the Brits and the IRA couldn't do - they have destroyed themselves

The origins of the 'Real IRA' can be traced to the run up to the second IRA cease-fire in 1997. A number of hard-line republicans, uneasy about the political strategy adopted by the Sinn Féin leadership, began to canvass support for a challenge to the republican leadership. By the time the cease-fire was announced in July of last year, a split was inevitable.

It came at an extraordinary IRA convention in Falcarragh near Gweedore, Co Donegal on October 10, 1997, attended by some 80 IRA delegates. These included three prominent members of Sinn Féin, two veteran Belfast republicans, the southern and northern commanders and the former head of the England

continued on page 33

Who's Who among th

Michael McKevitt

Michael McKevitt and his partner, Bernadette Sands-McKevitt, have been the people most prominently identified with the Real IRA. Both have adamantly denied any involvement in the Real IRA and there is no evidence suggesting that they had any involvement in the Omagh bombing.

Michael McKevitt and Bernadette Sands-McKevitt have said they are instituting legal action against several media organisations because of the suggestion of their complicity with the Omagh bomb and also because of the

identification of Michael McKevitt as the former IRA quarter-master who has been the key figure in the establishment of the Real IRA.

It was during the 1980s, when McKevitt was suspected of being a member of the IRA Executive, that the Provisional IRA imported the vast bulk of its arsenal. Some 134 tonnes of weapons and explosives were smuggled into Ireland from Libya in four separate shipments between 1985 and 1986. The fifth shipment, on board the Eksund, was seized in October 1987.

In 1988, McKevitt was arrested in Co Monaghan, along with leading republican, Patrick 'Slab' Murphy, on suspicion of IRA membership. Both were released without charge. McKevitt has no convictions for membership or any other paramilitary offence. Anti-terrorist branches of the Gardai and the RUC have extensive files on McKevitt but have no evidence on which to bring charges.

In 1975, Michael McKevitt was shot in both knees in Northern Ireland by members of the Official IRA but he refused to co-operate with

the police investigation. A staunch republican, he was intensely against Sinn Féin signing up to the Mitchell Principles and was opposed to the

1994 and 1997 IRA cease-fires and the Stormont Agreement.

Michael McKevitt (50) was born and reared in McSwiney Street, Dundalk, where his elderly mother still lives. He worked for a time in the Dundalk electronics firm, Ecco. In 1971 he married a local woman but she and her unborn baby were killed in a traffic accident

shortly afterwards. McKevitt then married Bernadette Farrelly and the couple had a son and daughter but the marriage ended in separation.

Those who know him, both gardai and dose associates, describe him as a "quiet, country type of man." A source who spent some time with the McKevitts around six years ago, said McKevitt was not a great talker, "Bernadette would do most of the talking. For much of the time he would sit in the chair with his shirt buttoned down. He was very courteous. He struck me as a typical country husband," he said.

Security sources regard him as a "good strategist" but say he lacks the political guile and intellectual abilities of other prominent republicans.

Until August 21, McKevitt ran a business in Dundalk, Print Junction, with his partner, Bernadette Sands-McKevitt and drives a black 1997 BMW. Sands-McKevitt is the mother of three of his five children and vice chairwoman of the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. The couple has lived quietly for more than 15 years at Blackrock, Co Louth.



Michael Burke

Leading Cork republican, Michael Burke, has emerged as the main organiser behind the recruiting drive for the 32 County Sovereignty Committee, the political organisation founded by republicans opposed to the Stormont Agreement. In the mid-1980s, Burke was one of an IRA gang who posed as a gardai, during the IRA kidnapping of Don Tidey. He was convicted of false imprisonment on June 26, 1986 and sentenced to 12 years in jail. He was questioned about the 1985 murder of IRA informer John Corcoran. Burke later disagreed with the republican leadership over the peace strategy. He was released from Portlaoise prison in 1994 and subsequently cut his ties with his former comrades.

42-year-old Burke from Ardculen, Hollyfield in Cork, is unemployed and married with three adult children. He devotes much of his time to the 32 County Sovereignty Committee. As one of the key political figures he travels around the country trying to organise support for the Committee.

Ciaran 'Kiwi' Dwyer

Ex IRA man Ciaran 'Kiwi' Dwyer is another important figure in the Sovereignty Committee. Dwyer (43) of Castletroy View outside Limerick City, was formerly in the Provisionals' quartermasters department where he acted as a regional quartermaster in Limerick/Tipperary area.

In 1990, Dwyer was caught with a

Anti-terrorist branches of the Gardai and the RUC have extensive files on McKevitt but have no evidence on which to bring charges.

ne Dissidents



vanload of ammunition near Southhill in Limerick. The haul included seven AK rifles, 30,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition, assorted ammunition and 10 pounds of Semtex explosives. He was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment—a sentence later reduced to 10 years on appeal. He was given early release on July 29, 1995 following the first IRA cease-fire. He was convicted previously in 1977 for membership of the IRA and sentenced to 12 months imprisonment in 1973 for unlawful collection and also in 1970 for a petty criminal offence.

A father of three, Dwyer is one of the four leading figures behind the Sovereignty Committee in Munster and has been influential in recruiting members into the political organisation.

Dwyer spoke to Magill at his semi-detached home on Saturday August 22, and said, "I'm saying nothing—s-g away," as he swiftly closed the door.

(Cannot be identified for legal reasons) A former IRA man from Tipperary, now living in Cork, was among the first to break away from the Provisionals, following an acrimonious Army convention in Gweedore last October. Originally a member of the quartermaster's department of the provisional IRA, the 39-year-old is now one of the leading military activists in the 'Real IRA'. His 'responsibilities' are similar to those he had in the Provisionals; to guard whatever weapons and supplies the organisation is currently in possession of, or



may acquire in the future. The former Provo was previously employed in the forestry industry. He has no paramilitary convictions. He was charged in the Special Criminal Court with assault, but the charge was later dropped. He is originally from Co Tipperary and now lives in Fermoy. He runs a small farm.

The Engineer, Inchicore, Dublin (Cannot be identified for legal reasons)

In February last, one of the country's top bomb makers defected to the Real IRA. It was to be their most valuable recruit to date. Not only did he bring with him a number of others from the Provisionals' engineering department, but more crucially, he brought the bomb-making expertise vital to an emerging paramilitary force. Along with another prominent dissident, he is one of the few IRA paramilitaries with knowledge of the locations of the Provisionals' arms dumps.

From Inchicore in west Dublin, he was arrested several times over the past 10 years, but was released without charge on each occasion because of lack of evidence. In his early thirties, the dissident republican is described by security sources as a clean cut, attractive, athletic type who drives a high-powered motorbike. In August 1997, the paramilitary was listed on the IRA's General Headquarters Staff (GHQ) as head of the Provisionals' engineering department.

department. According to both pro- and anti-leadership sources, prominent the Sinn Féin members argued that their political strategy was the correct one and one that would ultimately deliver the goal of a united Ireland.

On July 19, 24 hours before the announcement of the second IRA cease-fire, the Sinn Féin leadership on the IRA overrode a ruling by the 1996 Army Convention, which gave the 12-strong Army Executive, rather than the Army Council, the authority to call a cease-fire. The 1996 ruling was an attempt by the IRA membership to limit the powers of the Sinn Féin leadership on the IRA. The significance of that was the Sinn Féin leaders had a majority of four to three on the Council, whereas they were in a minority on the Executive. The massive internal wrangling that took place on the 18/19 held up the announcement by almost 24 hours.

The quartermaster and his supporters argued that by overruling the 1996 decision, and by signing up to the principles of non-violence, the leadership was in breach of the IRA constitution. This was the basis for the challenge.

The Sinn Féin leadership achieved a further success in persuading the Army convention to give retrospective authority to the Army Council to call a ceasefire. In fact the 1997 Convention was in breach of the 1996 Army Convention which gave the authority to the executive to call a ceasefire.

Commenting afterwards on the failure of the dissidents to win support at the Army Convention, a pro-leadership member said: "They were seen as politically naïve—most had never been members of Sinn Féin—and had no alternative political strategy. The militants failed to sway sufficient numbers of volunteers away from the leadership. They were militarily experienced but they could not provide a credible political alternative. In effect, what they were offering was the armalite minus the ballot box."

The militants were left with little option but to resign from the IRA. Two of them resigned from the Army Executive, accusing the leadership of a sell-out. At the same time, 20 Sinn Féin members from the Louth and Tyrone area resigned, including councillors Francie Mackey and Rory Dougan.

Initially, the security forces and the Provisionals played down the threat, saying the leadership had

taken the mass movement with it, leaving a small and insignificant rump behind.

Alarm bells should have been ringing, said a senior Provisional, as "it wasn't the numbers that was important, it was the calibre of the people who left."

In what is seen now as preparation for a permanent cease-fire, the Provisional leadership had in recent years ordered that its arsenal be moved in centralised or 'mother' dumps, to remain under the control of the quartermaster general. When the leadership challenge failed, the former quartermaster relinquished control of the entire arsenal to his successor, a Tyrone-born republican now living in Monaghan. Not a single weapon was removed from the dumps. "He had no choice but to hand them over intact. If he hadn't he'd have been shot dead," said a senior Provisional.

In January, the 32 County Sovereignty Committee was launched with Bernadette Sands-McKevitt at the helm. It is a single-issue campaign that derives its mandate from the 1919 Dáil Declaration of Independence and claims that the recent referendum was illegal. Its argument is based broadly on a submission to the United Nations that

claims Britain has no right to sovereignty and is in breach of UN covenants. The submission itself is slim, and relies heavily on documents by the late Sean MacBride, a former UN High Commissioner and minister for external affairs.

Behind the scenes, the militarists had started to re-group and it soon

the main activists in the 'Real IRA' in the south west had been the subject of an inquiry by the Provisionals into the misappropriation of IRA funds in the late 1980s. He and a number of close associates have since moved into the security business in the southeast.

Within the past two months, the former OC of the southern command went on the run after he gave gardai a verbal admission of IRA membership. He had stood down as OC following the murder of detective Gerry McCabe by the IRA in 1996. The Provisionals in the South were in disarray and this contributed significantly to the rise of the Real IRA.

Although the nucleus of the RIRA remains along the Louth border, the dissidents were growing numerically and geographically. Allied to the fact that some long term republicans were uneasy, they also had a certain appeal to young republicans who liked the tradition of a physical force opposition

and who were "easily convinced that the IRA had gone soft," said a senior Provisional.

They were gaining ground in Dublin, east Tyrone and Armagh, as disclosed by Magill in June. Magill also revealed that 15 Dublin-based Provisionals had defected. These include the former partner of a Sinn Féin negotiator, along with a first

"There is no evidence of co-operation between the CIRA and the RIRA."

became clear that the new organisation had the potential to become a serious threat. A number of factors came into play: the Provisionals accelerated the process of dismantling its southern command which began after the first cease-fire; the dissidents put into place a number of key people in Munster and adopted a strategy of replacing the IRA. One of

January 9, 1971: The IRA murdered six civilians in a land mine explosion at Brougher Mountain, near Trillick, Co Tyrone.



January 30, 1972: The British Army murdered 14 Catholics in Derry on what has become known as "Bloody Sunday".

June 21, 1972: The IRA murdered 9 people, including two British soldiers, in explosions in Belfast, on what has been remembered as "Bloody Friday".

The Killing Fields, 1971 - 1998

July 31, 1972: The IRA murdered 9 people in three car bomb explosions in the main street of Claudy, Co Derry.



August 22, 1972: 9 people were killed in a premature IRA bomb explosion at the Custom's Office at Newry. Three of

the victims were members of the IRA who were planting the bomb, the others were civilians.



February 4, 1974: 12 people were murdered (9 British soldiers and three civilians) in an IRA bomb attack on a British Army coach travelling on the M62 in Yorkshire.

May 17, 1974: 32 people were murdered by loyalist paramilitaries in three bomb explosions in Dublin and one in Monaghan.

November 21, 1974: 21 people were murdered in IRA bomb explosions at the Mulberry Bush and Tavern in the Town public houses in Birmingham.

cousin of the Inchicore bomb maker and the gunman suspected of the IRA murder of criminal Martin Cahill. In addition, two brothers, both of whom were long term members of the 1st battalion of south Armagh, the IRA's most professional and deadly unit, also joined. It is one of these men, rather than the Inchicore bomb-maker, who is the chief suspect behind the Omagh bomb, said a senior security source.

Significantly, the RIRA had never managed to penetrate the republican strongholds of Belfast and Derry. Although there is some dissent in these areas, they remain solidly behind the Adams/McGuinness leadership.

Along with ex-Provisionals, the RIRA got a number of defections from the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) shortly before the bombing of Newtownhamilton. The INLA members who defected are centred mainly on Louth.

By May, the Real IRA was more than 100-strong and included one of the country's top bomb makers. Apart from a hard core of activists, it had also recruited a number of 'sleepers' -republicans not known to gardai, as was the case with the Ashford raid in May.

However, while the organisation was growing, Garda "informers" also infiltrated it. The Gardai managed to foil 10 out of 14 operations planned by the Real IRA from January to

August. One of these was the attempted-armed robbery at Ashford, Co Wicklow, where a Real IRA activist, Ronan MacLochlainn, was shot dead by the Gardai.

The Real IRA was also almost certainly infiltrated by a Provisional IRA member who was relaying details of their movements back to the

seized in the Ashford raid was of Romanian origin and was not a Provo weapon and neither was the fairly new Magnum revolver seized.

Apart from a small amount of Semtex-which, with the right contacts can be obtained on the continent-the explosives seized were all home-made or were 'mix' in paramilitary language. It is likely that the RIRA leader "siphoned off" a small number of weapons during his time as quartermaster that did not find their way into the Provo dumps. The RIRA is still badly armed. Whatever weapons, home-made explosives and mortars it does possess are believed to be stored in a bunker just north of the Louth/Armagh border. The RIRA is also poorly resourced, although the dissidents had embarked on a fund-raising drive courtesy of former Noraid boss, US lawyer Martin

Galvin. Speaking to *Magill*, US Congressman Peter King said the possibility of serious funds coming from the US was extremely remote, as Irish America was firmly behind the Provos. "Gerry Adams had told the community over here that a united Ireland wasn't on the cards right now. It wasn't an easy thing to do, but he and Martin McGuinness and Joe

"Ineffect, what the RIRA were offering was the armalite minus the ballot box."

Provisionals. In response, the RIRA restructured in June into small cells to minimise the risk.

Contrary to reports, there was no co-operation from the Provisionals in any of the RIRA attacks, other than from Provisionals who had defected. None of the explosives or weapons used in various RIRA attacks came from the Provo arsenal. The AKM rifle



February 12, 1978: 12 people were murdered in an IRA firebomb attack on La Mon Restaurant at Gransha outside Belfast.



August 27, 1979: 22 people were murdered by the IRA in bomb attacks at Mulloughmore Harbour, Co Sligo, and at Narrow Water, near Warrenpoint, Co Down. The murdered included Lord Mountbatten (79), Lady Brabourne (82), Nicholas Brabourne (14), Paul Maxwell (15) and 18 British soldiers, four of whom were aged 18.



July 20, 1982: II British soldiers were murdered by two remote bomb

explosions on a British Army regiment at Hyde Park, London.



December 6, 1982: 17 people were murdered (II British soldiers and 6 civilians) in an INLA bomb attack at the Droppin Well bar at Ballykelly, Co Derry.

February 28, 1985: 9 RUC officers were murdered by the IRA in a mortar bomb attack on Newry RUC station.

May 8, 1987: The British Army murdered 8 IRA members in an ambush during a run and bomb attack on Loughgall RUC base in Co Armagh. A civilian was also murdered. (The characterisation of these killings as

Cahill have got the full backing of the Irish Americans. Funds coming from the US (to the dissidents) before Omagh would have been negligible: after Omagh there would be nothing at all," he said.

Nonetheless, the Provisionals were becoming increasingly worried about the growing influence of the RIRA and there are unconfirmed reports that they warned the RIRA leader to stop the campaign or face the consequences. According to a reliable political source, Bernadette Sands-McKevitt confided in him in May that the Provisionals had threatened to kill her and her partner. When contacted, Sands-McKevitt would not discuss the alleged threat.

In public, the dissidents were trying to make life very difficult for Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. At a recent west Belfast festival and at other events, strategically placed dissidents hurled verbal abuse at the Sinn Féin President and accused him of selling out. The Sands family boycotted a Sinn Féin rally to commemorate the hunger strikers and numbers were well down on previous years.

The Adams/McGuinness leadership was being backed into a corner, by Unionist leaders demanding both decommissioning and a declaration that the war is over, but more so through internal dissension. "Adams had gone as far as he could go. He couldn't declare an end to the war. If

he had, we were afraid we were looking at a dead man," said a Provisional, loyal to Adams. "They kept pressing him to come out with this and all the time he knew what was behind him. There was a feeling that [the RIRA leader] was on a winner no matter what. If a job went right, republicans would say 'that was a great operation' and if things went wrong, like Ashford, they would look like martyrs."

On May 3, the Provisionals publicly called for republicans to hold firm. But other more ominous developments were taking place in the background. Provisional IRA punishment shootings, similar to the one which killed Belfast man Andy Kearney, increased steadily throughout the year. From January 1, 31 shootings and 38 punishment beatings were carried out by various republican groupings, a significant number of which are blamed on Provisionals.

Two of the victims were prominent members of the Irish Republican Socialist Party and Republican Sinn Féin, the political wings of the INLA and the Continuity IRA (CIRA) respectively. Kevin McQuillan of the IRSP suffered a fractured skull and lost an eye and the hearing in one of his ears, arising out of a beating in June. The attack was motivated by his criticism of Sinn Féin, he claims. In Derry in July,

former internee Michael Donnelly suffered a broken leg after a group of masked men burst into his home. Donnelly claims his attackers accused him of costing the Provisionals a seat at Stormont.

Members of the Continuity IRA and of the INLA have said that the punishment attacks were undertaken in part to deter republican paramilitaries defecting to the Real IRA or other organisations.

Meanwhile, the RIRA campaign continued relentlessly. The attacks increased in frequency and ferocity in an apparent attempt to "up the ante" in the run up to the Stormont assembly meeting on September 14 next: Newry, Banbridge and Newtownhamilton.

"They were becoming more and more reckless," said a Provisional source. "We knew some disaster was going to happen, but not this (Omagh). Jesus, no one thought it was going to be as bad as that."

The Attacks

Since its inception, the Real IRA has planned 14 known attacks, 10 of which have been foiled by security forces north and south.

On January 7, two days after the Banbridge find, the Gardai seized 1.5 tonnes of home-made explosives in Howth and arrested three men.

On March 3, gardai discovered a

"murder" is made because there was no apparent attempt by the security forces to prevent the attack on the RUC station, suggesting that the strategy was to wipe out an IRA unit.)

November 8, 1987: 11 people were



murdered (all Protestant civilians apart from one off-duty RUC officer) in an IRA explosion near the war memorial during the Remembrance Day ceremony at Enniskillen.

August 20, 1988: 8 British soldiers murdered in an IRA land mine explosion near Ballygawley, Co Tyrone.



September 22, 1989: 11 British soldiers murdered in an IRA bomb attack on an army base at Deal in Kent.

January 17, 1992: 8 Protestant workers murdered in an IRA land mine



attack at Teebane Cross, near Cookstown, Co Tyrone. The workers had been doing repairs to a British army base near Omagh.

October 23, 1993: 9 Protestant civilians murdered and one IRA member killed in an IRA bomb explosion on Shankill Road, Belfast.

600lb bomb in a Renault car hidden in a shed in Hackballscross, Co Louth.

On March 22, gardai seized a massive 1,200lb bomb in a stolen Mitsubishi jeep in Dundalk. The bomb was primed and ready to be transported into Northern Ireland to coincide with the St Patrick's Day visit to White House by Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams. Also found was a timer unit, booster tubes and 10 rolls of home-made detonating cord.

On April 2, members of the Garda Special Branch seized a 1,200lb bomb concealed in a stolen BMW at the Dun Laoghaire ferry port.

On May 1, members of the heavily armed Emergency Response Unit intercepted a unit of the Real IRA as they allegedly attempted to hold up a Securicor van. One IRA man, Ronan MacLochlainn was shot dead by gardai.

On May 17, the dissidents carried out an attempted bombing in Armagh when a 500lb car bomb was left outside the city's police station. The car, a white Toyota Carina had been stolen in Dublin earlier.

On June 22, a mysterious explosion left a 10-foot crater in a field near Drumintee. It was the result of an explosives test by the Real IRA, sources close to the organisation told *Magill*. It is believed the paramilitaries were testing a mix of fertiliser and sugar.

On June 24, dissident republicans detonated a massive car bomb in Newtownhamilton, Co Armagh. Although the bomb was claimed by the INLA, the security forces say the bomb was made and organised by the Real IRA.

On July 10, British police arrested four people in London who were allegedly planning a series of fire-

bomb attacks in the UK.

On July 12, the RUC intercepted a 1,400lb car bomb in Moy, Co Tyrone, intended for Armagh City.

On July 13, a car bomb left outside Newry courthouse on July 13, failed to explode and was made safe by British

The Accused

Since its inception, some 25 members of the Real IRA were arrested. Of these, 15 have been charged with various paramilitary offences. They are: Seamus McLoughlin of Balkhill Park, Howth; Joseph Dillon of

Skerries, Co Dublin and Eamonn Flanagan of The Square, Skerries, all charged in connection with the Howth find.

Patrick MacDonagh of Cooley, Dundalk and Ciaran McDonagh of Greenfield Court, Dundalk are cousins charged in connection with a explosive find in Louth in March.

Larry Keane of Cloney, Athy, Co Kildare is charged with possession of improvised explosives at Dun Laoghaire on April 2.

Stephen Carney of Dolphin House, Dublin, Pascal Burke from Marrowbone Lane, Dublin, Philip Forsythe, Rollins Villas, Sallynoggin and Danny McAllister and Saoirse Breatnach from Ballybrack, Co Dublin are all charged with possession of firearms at Ashford on May 1.

Elaine Moore of Parkhill Road, Hampstead, Liam Grogan from Naas Co Kildare, Darren Mulholland of Meadowgrove, Dundalk and Anthony Hyland of no fixed abode, are all charged

with conspiracy and explosives offences on July 10 last.

The INLA cease-fire called on Saturday, August 22 was to have taken place two months earlier, according to documents seen by *Magill*. In late May, 30 INLA prisoners approved cease-fire proposals but the cessation was blocked by INLA members on the outside, mainly those from Dublin. The cease-fire was called for tactical reasons aimed at prisoner releases.

The Body Count 1968-1998

IRA	1760 (53%)
Other Republicans	199 (6%)
Loyalists	920 (28%)
Security Force	355 (11%)
Total Killings	3330

(These figures are taken from 'An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969-1993' by Malcolm Sutton and all available figures on killings since 1993)

Army experts.

On July 21, the Real IRA carried out a mortar bomb attack on the RUC station in the centre of Newry. The single 200lb mortar, which misfired and failed to explode, was similar to the heavy Mark IS mortar used by the Provisionals in the early 1990s.

On August 1, a huge car bomb exploded in Banbridge, Co Down, injuring 33 people and causing £2million worth of damage. A warning went off as the area was being evacuated.

August 15, a massive car bomb explodes in the centre of Omagh, killing 28 and injuring more than 100 people.

The Politics of the Greatest Atrocity

The Humanising of David Trimble

By Fionnuala O'Connor

The road towards peace becomes straighter and smoother in time, no one looking back can ignore how tragedy reshaped this summer. Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble and Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams look strengthened by the outcome of Omagh. The psychology is simpler than the politics: one should feed the other. But an altered David Trimble may still need more than can be given at this point, by the organisation Gerry Adams has helped change in tune with himself and the community he comes from.

There are signs that Trimble has at last begun to feel loyalty to a process, which has stumbled on through so many violent deaths and which Adams must find poignant, though hardly unexpected. Inside republicanism, the greatest deterrent for years to abandoning violence as an integral part of 'the struggle' was consideration of the Troubles as dead. As a prominent Sinn Féiner at the time once confided: "How do we justify all those deaths if we end the armed struggle short of our demands?" Adams and his allies found a way round that dilemma.

Trimble has begun to sound changed by his own experience since the Agreement, especially since becoming First Minister. Although he shows a new assurance, he will still face an alliance inside the new Assembly, of the Reverend Ian Paisley's DUP and the UK Unionist Bob McCartney. He knows that they hope to detach a half-dozen 'wobblers' within his own Assembly party. The combination would make him a lame duck leader, though pro-Agreement members would still have a working Assembly majority.

The first big test is the establishment of a shadow executive to ready the Assembly for devolution of a range of powers next February. The executive should be installed in the

next month, complete with two Sinn Féin ministers still a potent unionist bugbear and until very recently Trimble himself seemed entirely unready for the prospect. His own advocacy of the Agreement is full of reservations. He has yet to talk directly to Adams. But over a week filled with funerals and accounts of dreadful grief—which the bulk of Northern Ireland's divided population seemed to share equally for the first time in nearly thirty years of violence—the Ulster Unionist and Sinn Féin leaders sounded as though they were working, at a distance, towards a relationship.

The Trimble strategy, in so far as one exists, has depended on a greater force bouncing him from stage to stage, during which he rationalises on the hoof and largely ignores his demoralised party. The contrast with the tight organisation and committee-written party line of Sinn Féin could not be greater. It can also be misleading.

One republican insider says outsiders do Adams and Co. too much credit. "It's not that tied down. Half the time they're winging it, doing the best they can." The same person doubted if Adams could dispose of weapons even if he wanted to: "All those guns in Protestant hands and Unionists insist the 'Rah' hand theirs over? A couple of months after Drumcree? Come on. I don't know when Adams will be able to



For an Orangeman bidden by the Order's rules not to enter a Catholic Church Trimble's mere presence at a Mass must have been an experience, perhaps a personal milestone.

sell that idea." But the memory lingers of a prominent Sinn Féin member leering cheerfully, having first given the standard lecture on the impossibility of any weaponry being handed over at any time, not a bullet etc: "You know us," he said. "We'll do whatever we have to." In the aftermath of Omagh, Gerry Adams broke another taboo. A short statement in his name "condemned" the bombing, "without equivocation." Martin McGuinness was interviewed shortly afterwards and asked to repeat the 'c' word. Practised Shinner-watchers reckoned McGuinness didn't know Adams had already said it. In any case, he didn't follow suit.

But McGuinness openly welcomed the collapse of the Real IRA/32 County Sovereignty Committee. The argument continues about the effect on Adams and Co., though many nationalists seem agreed they must surely be less constrained now by fear of support seeping away to the Last Ditchers.

The short answer is that there may be no second chance for a "Real IRA" but what Adams and Co. can offer to reassure unionists is no clearer—perhaps because they don't know themselves. On the other hand, it was clear that republicans delighted in denouncing for the first time, instead of being denounced. A young County Tyrone Sinn Féin Assemblyman, Barry McElduff, put it well to a Dublin journalist after one of the funerals: "The most comforting thing in all this sorry business is that I can come in among these families as a republican to share

their grief and be warmly received."

A swathe of opinion in the aftermath of Omagh clearly differentiated between republicanism as presently led by Adams and that of the bombers. Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair and a section of unionist public opinion made plain that they believed the SF leader's unprecedented condemnation was genuine. David Trimble withheld approval in public. But he also refrained from suggesting as in the past that the Omagh bombers were the Provos' licensed surrogates. Anti-Agreement Unionists were less astute. Peter Robinson's early demand for the border to be sealed—a DUP staple for decades—had the same ring of bitter out-datedness as the title "32 County Sovereignty Committee." One bereaved relative said on radio

that some politicians were grave-dancing. He went on to say he hoped, as did others bereaved, that the carnage might spur efforts to make the Agreement work. The Antis went quiet.

Trimble himself showed movement over successive days. His first comment was the harshest, a judgement that Omagh would not have happened if arms had been handed in. But that was delivered down a phone in London, after a punishing drive through Europe to get home fast with his family from their interrupted holiday. A few days later Trimble made his own grand gesture. In one remarkable day, he went first to Buncrana to the funeral of the Donegal children killed at Omagh, then back to Omagh to see a veteran local UU official buried with his son, and finally to Dublin to meet Bertie Ahern. The day ended with him emerging from the Cabinet room to tell the media he was 'satisfied' with the emergency measures Bertie had outlined.

In Buncrana, the Bishop of Derry noted Trimble's presence in the congregation, with his deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, President McAleese and John Hume among others. The bishop wished Trimble well from the altar. The congregation applauded. For an Orangeman bidden by the Order's rules not to enter a

Catholic Church, mere presence at a Mass must have been an experience, perhaps a personal milestone. When the little Quinn boys died, Trimble visited the family but did not accompany Mallon to the funeral Mass, depriving a torn Northern Ireland of a powerful symbol.

The aftermath of Omagh saw Trimble grow. Interviews with the BBC and UTV on the eve of the memorial service on August 22 showed him calm and even magnanimous. In place of the old carping at Adams came a reasonable request. He wasn't speaking to Sinn Féin in a challenging way. He wouldn't put words in their mouths, but there must have been ways to do this. People needed to be convinced that the IRA's violence was at an end.

Trimble must have been sustained by popular feedback, probably drawn from the airwaves rather than his disparate party. For a week, people devoured TV and radio coverage of Omagh, distraught but compelled to watch funeral after funeral, soaking up accounts by witnesses, nurses and police. Radio Ulster programmes were swamped by callers—many from Omagh—expressing fury; grief and determination that the bombers should not "wreck the chance of peace" with a whole-heartedness usually precluded by the traditional need to make or refute sectarian



In the aftermath of Omagh, Gerry Adams broke another taboo. A short statement in his name "condemned" the bombing, "without equivocation."

points. Like many others previously; this atrocity hurt Catholics as well as Protestants. But this time neither blamed the other community. There were no doubts that the bomb was directed against the fledgling settlement, the new majority who voted for the Agreement.

In private conversations, as on the air, people supposed that this felt like the worst atrocity of the Troubles. This was partly because the May 1974 bombings, which killed 33 in Dublin and Monaghan, had always been curiously downplayed and partly because the taste for peace had grown to the point where even the INLA recognised that no justification remained for violence.

But there was also a feeling that "they bombed us all." People said it repeatedly, in one way or another: "they'll not break the Agreement, they can't be let. It would be an insult to Omagh's dead and maimed and broken-hearted." A dry political compromise has developed a life of its own. Consideration of the play between personalities and parties is all very well. It neglects the emergence of a steely popular will to protect the progress made so painfully; the delight that the ill-wishers are now fewer, or weaker; the determination that everyone involved should find a way round whatever difficulty comes next.